

Swift Tern

Geelbekseeswael

Sterna bergii

The Swift (or Greater Crested) Tern is found in the south-east Atlantic Ocean, the Indian Ocean and the western Pacific Ocean (Harrison 1983b). The Australian population may exceed one million birds (Van Tets & Fullagar 1984); elsewhere there are *c.* 20 000 pairs (Croxall *et al.* 1984; Croxall 1991). It occurs around the southern African coastline, where the atlas indicates relatively high reporting rates at most localities where there was adequate coverage. The nominate subspecies *S. b. bergii* is endemic to the region, numbering about 6000 pairs at 22 breeding localities. Its known nonbreeding range extends from Luanda, Angola, to Kosi Bay (2632DD) and its breeding distribution from Swakopmund (2214DA) to Algoa Bay (3326CD) (Cooper *et al.* 1990). About 80% of the southern African population breeds at islands between Saldanha Bay (3317AA) and Cape Town (3318CD) (Crawford & Dyer 1995). Small numbers of *S. b. enigma*, thought to breed on islands off Mozambique and Madagascar, occur in the east as far south as Durban (2931CC), but do not breed (Clancey 1979a).

Habitat: It feeds on small pelagic fish and crustaceans, on or near the surface, in bays and on nearshore open sea (Walter *et al.* 1987; Berruti *et al.* 1989; Crawford & Dyer 1995). It rarely moves inland or far out to sea (Cooper *et al.* 1990), although it may cross narrow stretches of land separating waterbodies. It nests on the ground at offshore islands, islets in pans, estuaries, salt and sewage works, and fenced-off areas in harbours (Cooper *et al.* 1990).

Movements: It disperses around the southern African coast after breeding. Immature birds may remain in the nonbreeding range during the breeding season. The models indicate that reporting rates off the southwestern Cape Province are high in late summer and autumn, the main breeding season in the region (Crawford *et al.* 1994); they decrease through winter because of dispersal out of the region. In KwaZulu-Natal and the Transkei, reporting rates were lowest in autumn, but increased in winter and spring, probably as a result of birds moving into the area from

breeding localities to the west. In southern Namibia most breeding is April–July (Cooper *et al.* 1990), which is when reporting rates were highest between Lüderitz (2615CA) and St Helena Bay (3218CC). In northern Namibia, breeding is in late winter (Cooper *et al.* 1990), again coinciding with higher reporting rates in the region.

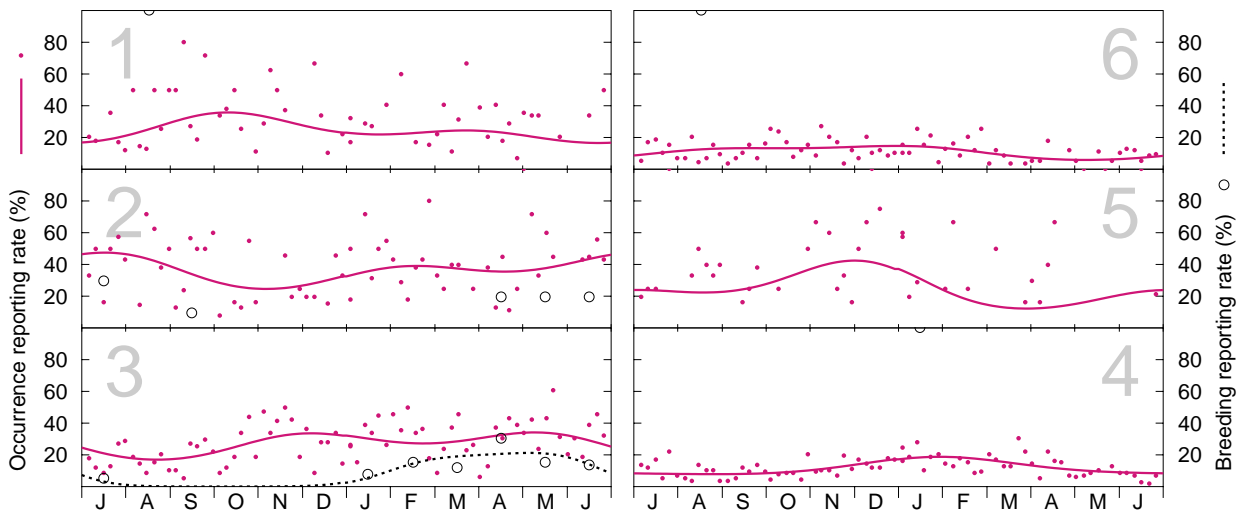
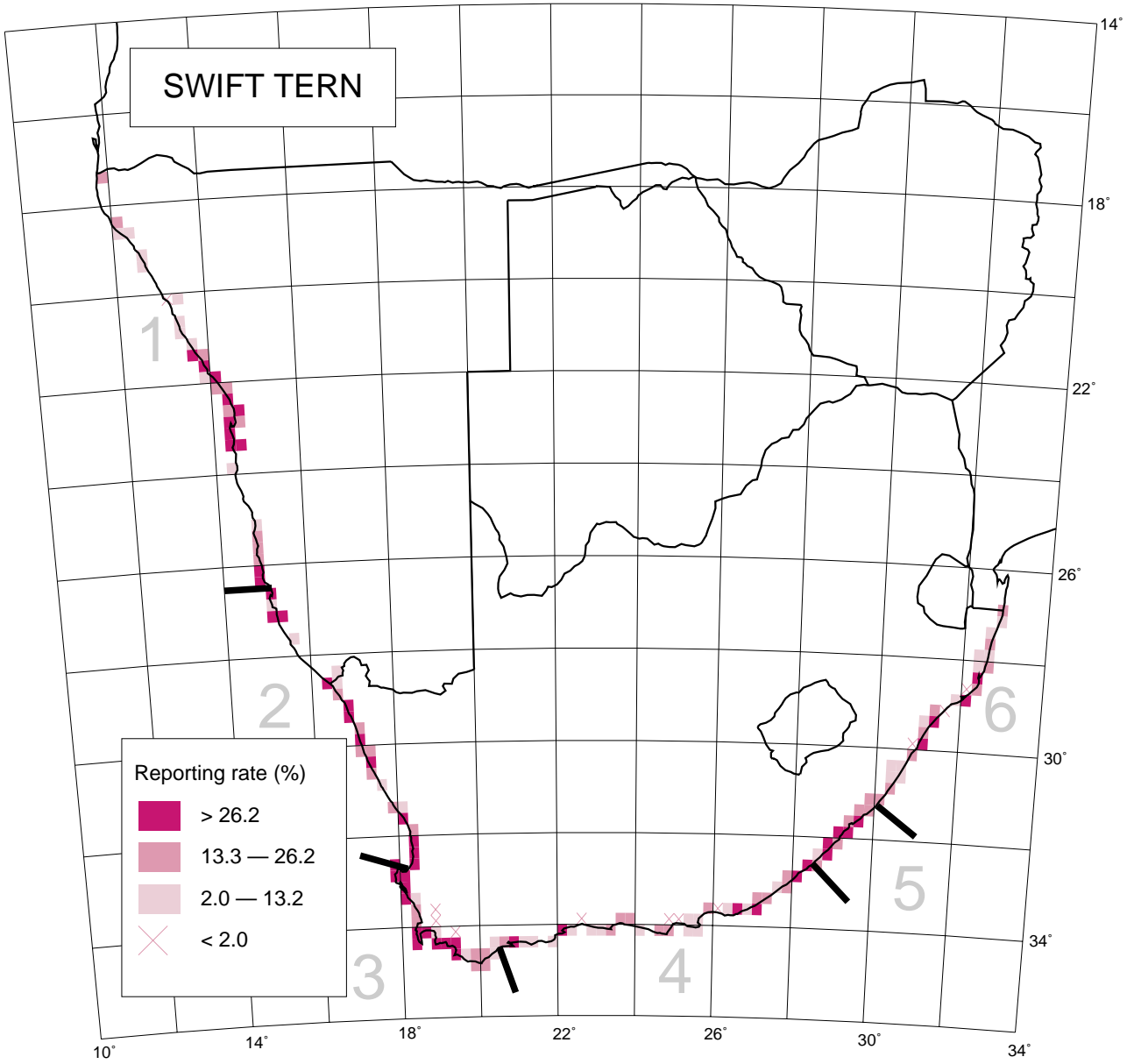
Breeding: Breeding may occur February–October (Maclean 1985c). In the southwestern Cape Province, the peak is in February or March in most years (Crawford *et al.* 1994), but to the north and east it is usually later (Cooper *et al.* 1990). It nests colonially (Maclean 1985c) and is nomadic between different breeding localities (Crawford *et al.* 1994).

Interspecific relationships: It often breeds in association with Hartlaub's Gulls *Larus hartlaubii* (Maclean 1985c) and Crowned Cormorants *Phalacrocorax coronatus* (pers. obs). Chicks at the edge of a colony are sometimes taken by Kelp Gulls *L. dominicanus* (pers. obs).

Historical distribution and conservation: The historical distribution was probably similar to the present, although new breeding sites have become available in salt and sewage works. There are large interannual fluctuations in numbers of birds breeding in the southwestern Cape Province, which are related to the abundance of the main prey, Anchovy *Engraulis capensis* (Crawford & Dyer 1995). The Swift Tern is therefore dependent on good management of the Anchovy resource, which is intensively fished. Large numbers of Swift Terns sometimes breed at Dassen (3318AA) and Robben (3318CD) islands, where feral domestic cats may prey on chicks. Disturbance of breeding birds by people and their pets in Lüderitz, on Shark Island and in the harbour, needs to be controlled (Cooper *et al.* 1990).

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Recorded in 151 grid cells, 3.3%
Total number of records: 5628
Mean reporting rate for range: 21.0%



Models of seasonality for Zones. Number of records (top to bottom, left to right):
 Occurrence: 170, 203, 374, 312, 73, 267; Breeding: 1, 10, 52, 1, 0, 1.